

The Cay

By

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**20 Important Quotes
&
What We Learn From Them**

The Cay: Important Quote 1

*To Dr. King's dream,
Which can only come true
If the very young know and understand. (Dedication)*

Taylor begins his novel with a dedication to Martin Luther King, Jr., a leader in the American Civil Rights Movement. The dedication suggests that the book will explore race relationships and issues of equality.

The Cay: **Important Quote 2**

He crawled over toward me. His face couldn't have been blacker, or his teeth whiter. They made an alabaster trench in his mouth, and his pink-purple lips peeled back over them like the meat of a conch shell. He had a big welt, like a scar, on his left cheek. I knew he was West Indian. I had seen many of them in Willemstad, but he was the biggest one I'd ever seen.

Before he goes blind, Phillip gives us a physical description of Timothy, emphasizing how big and scary he is. What do you notice about the words Phillip chooses to describe Timothy? For example, why does he compare Timothy's teeth to an "alabaster trench" and his lips to a "conch shell"? What effect do these phrases have?

The Cay: **Important Quote 3**

Although I hadn't thought so before, I was now beginning to believe that my mother was right. She didn't like them. She didn't like it when Henrik and I would go down to St. Anna Bay and play near the schooners. But it was always fun. The black people would laugh at us and toss us bananas or papayas.

Phillip reveals that he has picked up negative ideas about black West Indians from his mother. Why doesn't she want her son to associate with the black people in Willemstad?

The Cay: **Important Quote 4**

He looked at me in the fading light and said softly, "We will 'ave no other food tonight. You bes' eat dem, young bahss." With that, he pressed a piece of the fish against his teeth, sucking at it noisily.

Yes, they were different. They ate raw fish.

Phillip is pretty freaked out by Timothy's seemingly uncivilised meal of raw fish. He draws the conclusion that Timothy – and all black West Indian people – are "different" from him. Is Phillip right or wrong? Why does Timothy encourage Phillip to eat the fish?

The Cay: **Important Quote 5**

Once, our bodies touched. We both drew back, but I drew back faster. In Virginia, I knew they'd always lived in their sections of town, and us in ours. A few times, I'd gone down through the shacks of colored town with my father. They sold spicy crabs in one shack, I remember.

Phillip describes his segregated hometown back in Virginia, where white and black people lived separately. Is it easier to maintain racist views if you don't live alongside other races? Why or why not?

The Cay: **Important Quote 6**

"You say what you want." It was just that Timothy looked very much like the men I'd seen in jungle pictures. Flat nose and heavy lips.

He shook his head. "I've no recollection o' anythin' 'cept dese islan's. 'Tis pure outrageous, but I do not remember anythin' 'bout a place called Afre-ca."

Phillip assumes that because Timothy is black he must be from Africa. What do we learn here about the differences between Phillip and Timothy? How does Timothy see himself?

The Cay: Important Quote 7

"You ugly black man! I won't do it! You're stupid, you can't even spell."

Frustrated when Timothy asks him to help weave sleeping mats, Phillip lashes out at him. He goes for some low blows and calls Timothy ugly, stupid, and illiterate. Phillip's judgments about Timothy are obviously incredibly superficial. How does Timothy respond?

The Cay: Important Quote 8

Wanting to hear it from Timothy, I asked him why there were different colors of skin, white and black, brown and red, and he laughed back, "Why b'feesh different color, or flower b'different color? I true don' know, Phill-eep, but I true tink beneath d'skin is all d'same."

Timothy tells Phillip that though humans have different colors of skin, they are all the same underneath. This message of equality will resonate with Phillip through the remainder of the book. Do you agree with Timothy?

The Cay: **Important Quote 9**

I moved close to Timothy's big body before I went to sleep. I remember smiling in the darkness. He felt neither white nor black.

Though he recoiled from Timothy's touch before, Phillip now sleeps close to him. Their relationship has become desegregated; that is, the barriers between them have broken down. Phillip's blindness has led to colorblindness.

The Cay: Important Quote 10

I had now been with him every moment of the day and night for two months, but I had not seen him. I remember that ugly welted face. But now, in my memory, it did not seem ugly at all. It seemed only kind and strong.

I asked, "Timothy, are you still black?"

His laughter filled the hut.

Phillip's blindness allows him to cast aside his preconceived notions and get to know Timothy in a different way. Why doesn't Phillip think of Timothy as black or white?

The Cay: **Important Quote 11**

The pilot had flown away, perhaps thinking I was just another native fisherman waving at an aircraft. I knew that the color of my skin was very dark now.

While he's definitely had a change of heart about race, Phillip has also become darker himself. How is this moment symbolic?

The Cay: **Important Quote 12**

I saw Henrik van Boven occasionally, but it wasn't the same as when we'd played the Dutch or the British. He seemed very young. So I spent a lot of time along St. Anna Bay, and at the Ruyterkade market talking to the black people. I liked the sound of their voices. Some of them had known old Timothy from Charlotte Amalie. I felt close to them.

Phillip realises it's not race that binds you to someone – it's shared experiences and values. Why does he no longer connect with Henrik van Boven? What does he have in common with the West Indian people in St. Anna Bay?

The Cay: Important Quote 13

I stole away down to the old fort with Henrik van Boven, my Dutch friend who was also eleven.

I had played there many times with Henrik and other boys when we were a few years younger, imagining we were defending Willemstad against pirates or even the British.

**What is Henrik and Phillip's friendship based on?
How does it reflect their age?**

The Cay: **Important Quote 14**

My mother was right, I thought. They had their place and we had ours. He did not really like me, or he would have taken me along. He was different.

Phillip thinks Timothy isn't his friend because the older man sometimes leaves him alone on the island. Why does Timothy do this? Does this make him a friend or a foe?

The Cay: **Important Quote 15**

Suddenly, the tears came out. I knew it was not a manly thing to do, something my father would have frowned on, but I couldn't stop. Then from nowhere came Stew Cat. He rubbed along my arms and up against my cheek, purring hard. I held him close.

Stew may only be a cat, but he's an important friend for Phillip on the island, offering solace and comfort when Phillip faces tough times.

The Cay: Important Quote 16

Something happened to me that day on the cay. I'm not quite sure what it was even now, but I had begun to change.

I said to Timothy, "I want to be your friend."

He said softly, "Young bahss, you've always been my friend."

**I said, "Can you call me Phillip instead of young boss?"
"Phill-eep," he said warmly.**

Phillip eventually accepts Timothy as a friend and asks him to be his friend in return. Timothy says he's been Phillip's friend all along. What has changed in Phillip, and why? Why does Phillip ask Timothy to call him by his first name? What does this symbolise?

The Cay: Important Quote 17

We talked for a long time when the rain began to slack off. Timothy asked me about my mother and father. I told him all about them and about how we live in Scharloo, getting very lonesome and homesick while I was telling him. He kept saying, "Ah, dat be true?"

Timothy and Phillip become closer friends by sharing their stories. Hearing about each other's lives before their time on the island leads to a greater intimacy between the two.

The Cay: Important Quote 18

Some of the women cried at the sight of her, and I saw men, my father included, with tears in their eyes. It didn't seem possible that only a few hours before I had been standing on her deck. I was no longer excited about the war; I had begun to understand that it meant death and destruction.

Phillip is no longer excited about the arrival of the German submarines in the Caribbean. Witnessing the explosion of the *Empire Tern* forces him to realize that war means "death and destruction" – not excitement and games.

The Cay: Important Quote 19

I'll never forget that first hour of knowing I was blind. I was so frightened that it was hard for me to breathe. It was as if I'd been put inside something that was all dark and I couldn't get out.

I remember that at one point my fear turned to anger. Anger at Timothy for not letting me stay in the water with my mother, and anger at her because I was on the raft. I began hitting him and I remember him saying, "If dat will make you bettah, go 'ead."

Phillip is injured when a torpedo hits the *S.S. Hato*, and he eventually goes blind. The blindness causes a massive change in his life. Here Phillip sees only darkness and becomes angry at those around him. How might the darkness also become a positive force in Phillip's life?

The Cay: Important Quote 20

Suddenly, I wished my father and mother could see us there together on the little island.

I moved close to Timothy's big body before I went to sleep. I remember smiling in the darkness. He felt neither white nor black.

While Phillip initially thinks Timothy is very different because of his race, Phillip comes to see Timothy as "neither white nor black." What does Phillip mean by this? How has Phillip's perception of Timothy changed?

The Cay: **20 Important Quotes**

Quotes and comments from www.shmoop.com

Document compiled by Peter Blake